Heritage Matters

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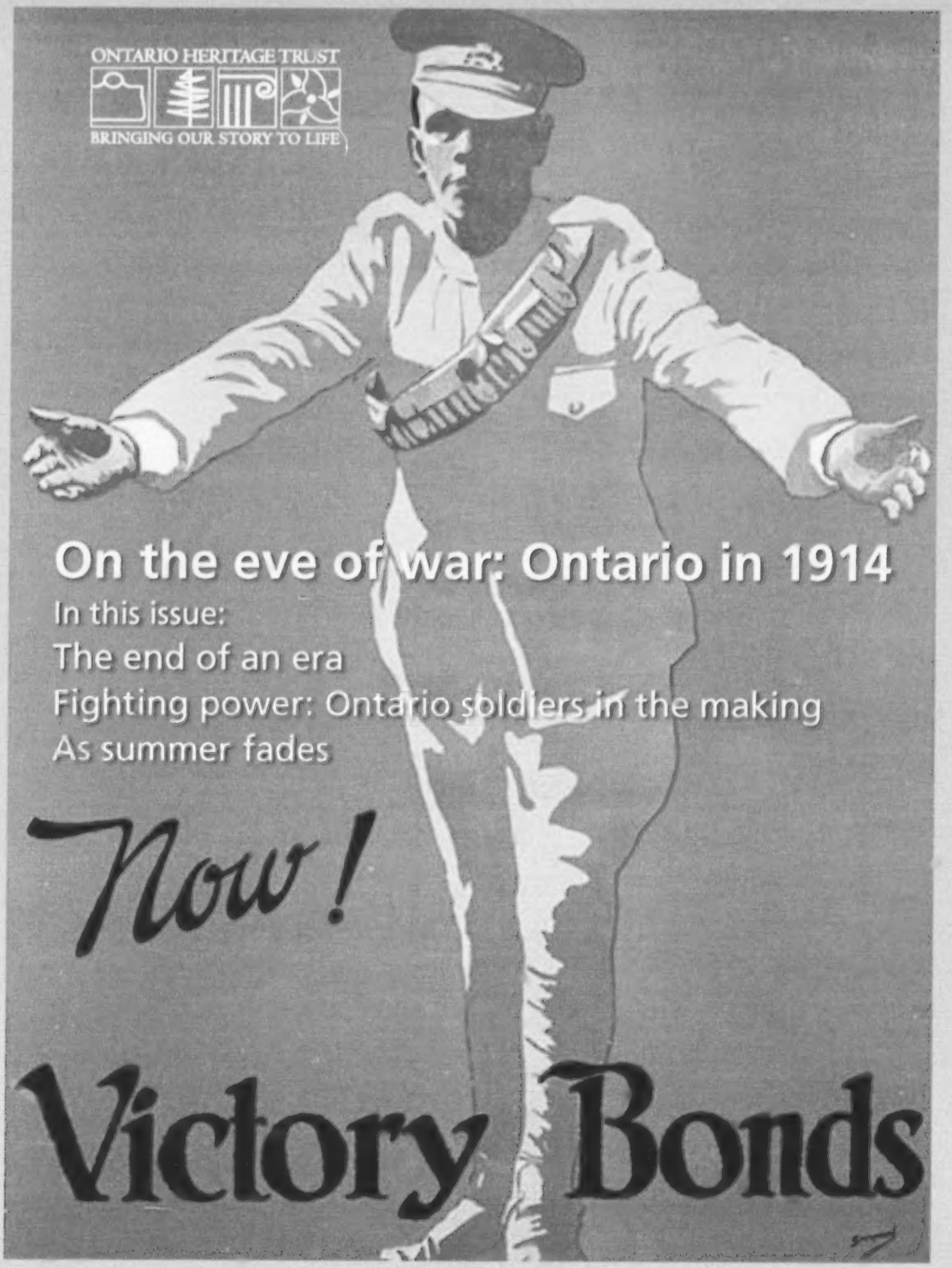
ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST
BRINGING OUR STORY TO LIFE
On the eve of war: Ontario in 1914
In this issue:
The end of an era
Fighting power: Ontario soldiers in the making
As summer fades
Now!
Victory Bonds

Ontario and the First World War

The advent of the First World War marked the beginning of a period of rapid and intense change across the globe. In this issue of Heritage Matters, we begin a discussion of the implications of the war on Ontarians, both at home and abroad, between the years 1914-18. We reveal late Edwardian life in Ontario through the eyes of Toronto's Ashbridge family, while Jonathan Vance discusses the composition of the fighting force from Ontario.

On the eve of war: Ontario in 1914 describes the political, economic and social context in Ontario as we entered the war. In discussion with Dr. Laura Brandon from the Canadian War Museum, we explore the role of war art and the war artist in defining the experience for people at home. And finally, we follow the story of 1914 from the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand to the arrival of Ontario's first troops in Europe.

In the coming months and years, we will explore and interpret a variety of perspectives to understand better how this period of intense change thrust Ontario firmly into the 20th century and greatly influenced its provincial identity and approach to modern life and society. With the province as its museum, the Trust will examine sites, artifacts, art, literature, technology, social customs and memory. There will be opportunities to participate as the story unfolds on our website, through provincial plaques, Doors Open Ontario, Heritage Week activities, Heritage Matters, dialogues and exhibits. Like us on Facebook for information on activities; follow the commemorative calendar on Twitter. It promises to be fascinating!

Beth Hanna
Executive Director, Ontario Heritage Trust

Contents

The end of an era, by Erin Semande 2

Fighting power: Ontario soldiers in the making, by Jonathan Vance 4

On the eve of war: Ontario in 1914, by Wayne Kelly 7

An interview with Laura Brandon 11

As summer fades, by Sam Wesley 14

Resources 16

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ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST
BUILDING OUR STORY TO LIFE

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Cover: J.E. Sampson. Archives of Ontario War Poster Collection [between 1914 and 1918]. (Archives of Ontario, C 233-2-1-0-296).

A message from the Chairman: Ontario in 1914

A century ago, Ontario was on the eve of the First World War – a global conflict that devastated a continent, altered the course of world history, and led to a century of unprecedented upheaval. The effects of this conflict greatly impacted, and indeed continue to influence, the lives of citizens both at the national level and within individual communities.

In Ontario, the onset of the war marked the beginning of an intense period of transformation that had significant implications for the identity and values of the fastest-growing and most populous province in the Canadian Dominion – itself the senior colony of the British Empire. In the twilight of the Edwardian era, the prevailing attitude of the province was, at least outwardly, to a large extent British, colonial, class-based and conservative. Many of its people held primarily agrarian values; most were committed to their community and to their family, were proud of their young nation and strongly patriotic. Ontarians were optimistic about the future, if perhaps somewhat politically and militarily naïve about how the potential of the looming global conflict would affect their lives. At the same time, a society that remained fundamentally Victorian on the surface was also beginning to experience undercurrents of resistance to the perceived *status quo*.

It would not be difficult for us to recognize and comprehend many aspects of 1914 Ontario. Industrialization, mechanization and urbanization were driving the economy and reshaping society. Airplanes and motorized vehicles were becoming increasingly visible. The railway was the ubiquitous network that tied it all together. In the midst of this growth and development, poverty remained a constant reality for many citizens.

Other attributes of pre-war Ontario are, thankfully, less familiar to us today. Women were denied the vote, and gender, racial and religious discrimination were widespread. The British tradition of parliamentary government, common law and civil liberties, however, were in place.

The Great War and its aftermath unequivocally transformed Ontario. Since that time, our society has continued to change, often dramatically, while its population – along with its core values – has evolved and diversified.

It is my hope that you will enjoy reading this issue of Heritage Matters, which seeks to depict and reflect on Ontario as it was in the years leading up to the First World War of 1914-18, and that it may cause you to consider some of the changes that impacted the identity and development of the province during, and in the years following, the war.

Tom Symons

Thomas H.B. Symons
C.C., O.Ont, FRSC, LLD, D.Litt., D.U., D.Cn.L., FRGS, KSS

The end of an era

By Erin Semande

The years before the Great War are often romanticized as a series of garden parties, Sunday afternoon strolls in the park, stopping everything for afternoon tea, and a society rigidly divided by class. It is the last era to bear the name of a British monarch, Edward VII, 1901-10 – although the sentiments of the era extended well beyond Edward's death as far as the end of the First World War.

We seem to know much – or think we do – about the Edwardians, thanks to their portrayal in popular culture through the likes of *Titanic*, *Downton Abbey* and the historical reality shows *Edwardian Farm* and *Manor House*. But what was Edwardian life like for the everyday Ontarian? How did the sentiments and attitudes of this age reveal themselves? To answer these questions, we delved into the Trust's archival collection and found the detailed personal records of a middle-class Toronto family from that time.

The Trust owns and manages Toronto's Ashbridge Estate and is fortunate to have a major archival collection associated with the family. The Ashbridge family lived in the Toronto area from the late 18th century, but a large portion of the collection depicts their life during this pre-First World War era.

The courtship of Wellington Ashbridge (1869-1943) and his future bride Mabel Davis (1879-1952) is captured in a series of revealing letters. The two met at the Queen Street Methodist Church near their east-end homes. They wrote to one another while Wellington worked as a civil engineer in Edmonton in 1902-03. These courtship letters depict the reserved and old-fashioned temperament of the day. Only after months of writing and an official engagement did they begin to address each other by their first names. While the letters document their love and affection for one another, they also offer a captivating glimpse into middle-class Edwardian life.

For a young woman, Mabel had a great deal of responsibility. Prior to her marriage to Wellington, Mabel worked long hours at the Toronto Railway Company offices as "No. 3 cash counter," often taking the trolley (streetcar) to work from her suburban home and forming friendships with the women with whom she worked. She helped take care of her mother, who suffered from poor mental health. The letters display her agonizing over a decision to send her mother away to an asylum – the only care option (other than staying with the family) that was available at the time.

Miss Mabel Davis (far right) with her colleagues at the Toronto Railway Company office, 1903.

Photograph taken by Wellington Ashbridge of an amateur play, "The Happiest Land," at Queen Street East Methodist Church (1902).

With her mother unwell, Mabel took care of the household and often fell behind on chores; she repeatedly mentioned being exhausted. She would set her alarm for 3:30 a.m. to finish laundry from the previous day before she left for work.

Mabel enjoyed typical leisure activities, including: playing the organ, attending church services and social events, making hats, going for strolls, driving in the new "open car," sitting on her veranda with friends, going to plays and, of course, "taking" tea – one of the most stereotypical Edwardian activities.

After Mabel and Wellington married, they moved out West and their two daughters were born – Dorothy in 1905 and Winifred "Betty" in 1907. In 1913, Wellington returned to Toronto with his young family to supervise the subdivision and sale of Ashbridge landholdings for suburban development – an episode typical of this period of rapid urbanization.

There is little direct evidence left by Dorothy and Betty from before the war. Through Mabel's detailed account books, however, we can gather information about their childhood. Dorothy and Betty had comforts not afforded to many children of the era – such as new dresses, coats, books and music lessons. We also know that they participated in popular activities for children at the time – including sending and receiving Valentine's Day cards, first popularized during the late Victorian era.

The years before the war were fondly remembered and recorded by the Ashbridge family, several of whom experienced it in their youth. Mabel shared in a letter to Wellington the following poem that she had submitted for a contest:

> *"The future is not given for man to know*
> *Else all would be confusion in life's race,*
> *But onward, upward ever toiling slow*
> *He'll reach at last the very throne of grace"*

There is clearly a sense of optimism, progress and piety in these lines, which we might infer as typical of the times. But, as history was to prove, the hopefulness expressed by Mabel – and undoubtedly shared by many in society – would soon be severely tested by the horrors of modern warfare.

Erin Semande is a Researcher with the Ontario Heritage Trust. All images courtesy of the Trust's Ashbridge Collection.

Valentine sent to Dorothy Ashbridge in 1914 from her friend Norma.

Fighting power: Ontario soldiers in the making

By Jonathan F. Vance

A relaxed group of militiamen at Camp Petawawa in June 1914.

That Canadians are an unmilitary people has become something of a cliché. But a look back at Ontario in the summer of 1914 might leave a different impression.

Across the province, units of Canada's militia were engaged in the annual training ritual. At city armouries (many of them brand new – a product of the federal government's Edwardian building campaign), part-time soldiers practised drill, musketry, field hygiene and military engineering. The units' names were impressive – the Queen's Own Rifles, the Governor-General's Foot Guards, the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment – and the men cut fine figures. Their officers were wealthy and influential, and had the resources to ensure that the soldiers always performed well. Some commanding officers even took their units to Britain for summer manoeuvres to sharpen them up and show them off.

The situation was slightly different outside of big cities. The units' names sounded just as formidable – the 25th Brant Dragoons, the Simcoe Foresters, the St. Clair Borderers – but contemporary photographs suggest that their summer training camps were more relaxed. The men lounged around in an odd mixture of civilian clothes and military uniforms, with officers sometimes indistinguishable from other ranks. They marched and galloped across the countryside, playing out day-long encounters between opposing armies. The press usually called them "sham battles," but one eager soldier recognized their true nature and called them "shambles." For many young

Looking considerably more martial is this group of finely turned-out soldiers from Toronto's Queen's Own Rifles, stationed in England before the start of the First World War.

men, militia camp was less about training for a future war and more about relaxation, recreation and getting away from the drudgery of the home farm.

When war broke out at the beginning of August 1914, the cities responded first – or so historians tell us. A few militia units were put on an active footing on July 29 to guard docks, rail junctions and other strategic sites. Then, on the declaration of war a few days later, urban armouries became hives of activity as city workers – many of them British-born and with military experience – answered the call. In the countryside, men were less carried away by patriotic fervour, for their attention was focused on pragmatic rural concerns, such as the coming harvest.

While it should be noted that the majority of early volunteers were, indeed, of British birth, the reality was somewhat different. It was not that men in rural Canada were slower to respond to the call to arms, but that it was more difficult for them to do so. The first call went out to every militia unit across the country, but only those in the cities were told to accept volunteers and send them to the assembly camp at Valcartier, Quebec. It would be two weeks before rural regiments were given the go-ahead to begin sending soldiers. By then, the units of the First Contingent were mostly full. Most rural volunteers had no choice but to wait for the Second Contingent.

Nor were those early volunteers the seasoned soldiers some of them claimed to be. On coming forward for attestation, men were asked if they were serving in the militia or had previous military experience. But their responses should be treated with caution.

A volunteer for the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), before he could join an overseas unit, was often required to join the militia regiment that was doing the recruiting. He would then state that he had militia experience, even if it was only the few minutes it took to complete one form and turn to the second. Nor can claims of previous service be taken at face value, for no proof was required. A volunteer may have said that he had served in Britain's Territorial Army, safe in the knowledge that no one would try to verify it. Even more difficult were claims of service in foreign armies. Among the volunteers for the Third Battalion, raised in Toronto at the beginning of the war, were men who claimed to have served in the Spanish-American War, the Greek and Russian armies, and the militia of British Guiana. Evaluating such claims – at the time, let alone a century later – was impossible.

Still, by any measure, Ontario's response to the call for men was impressive. A pre-war mobilization plan had given the province a quota for its contribution to any overseas contingent. In August 1914, Ontario exceeded that quota by approximately 30 per cent.

The people of St. Thomas gather to bid farewell to a group of volunteers bound for the Western Front.

Ontario's three divisional areas contributed nearly 10,000 of the First Contingent's 26,000 officers and men, and even that number was low because hundreds of Ontario enlistments were counted with districts in Manitoba and Quebec.

Furthermore, those numbers did not include many other early volunteers. Ontario was home to thousands of reservists of the British Army (not to mention the French, Italian, Russian and even the German and Austro-Hungarian armies), soldiers who had completed their regular terms of service but could be recalled to their units in the event of hostilities. In the late summer of 1914, Ontario newspapers were full of stories of recent immigrants returning to Britain to rejoin the colours. *Ad hoc* units, such as the Welland Canal Force and the St Lawrence Patrol, accepted volunteers to protect vital interests. Later, men could join the Railway Service Guard to work on troop trains. Militia regiments also continued to accept volunteers. Late in the war, they would be transferred en masse to the CEF, but in 1914 they did not show up in the usual statistics.

Over the course of a few days in August 1914, Ontario was dramatically changed. The streets may not have looked different. Colourful recruiting posters, Victory Bond advertisements, service flags hanging in parlour windows, black armbands and mourning veils were all things of the future. But the sense that life had changed irrevocably was unmistakable.

At least one Ontario home was already in mourning. Toronto native Stanley Wilson had been serving in Britain's Royal Navy for more than a decade when war was declared, and his vessel HMS Amphion had been in action from the first day. But, on August 6, the Amphion struck two mines while returning to its base at Harwich and sank within 15 minutes, taking Stanley Wilson and a hundred other sailors with it. Over the next four years, thousands of other Ontario homes would feel the same sting; mourning would become a universal condition.

Jonathan F. Vance is a Distinguished University Professor and J.B. Smallman Chair in the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario.

All images are courtesy of the Ley and Lois Smith Archive of War and Popular Culture, History Department, University of Western Ontario.

On the eve of war: Ontario in 1914

By Wayne Kelly

What was life like in Ontario during those years before the First World War? Before the war that saw men leave their families and friends to fight overseas – many of whom did not return, and those who did, returned as changed men? Before the war that made women persons and yet, at the same time, took away from many immigrants their most basic human rights? Before the war that defined a generation and helped shape the country's emerging nationhood?

In 1914, Ontario was an economic power and political driver in Canada. The physical landscape of Ontario was divided into new and old – Old Ontario referring to areas of the province, predominantly in south-central Ontario, that had been settled in the 18th and 19th centuries, and New Ontario representing northern areas that were newly added to the province in 1912 and/or were opened for settlement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by railroads, shipping and homesteaders. This expansion created a network of communication and commercial activity linking old and new.

Immigration to Ontario came in waves from Britain, the United States, Europe and elsewhere. Communities of Italians and other non-British immigrants lived in Toronto, Germans in Berlin (renamed Kitchener during the war), French and Scandinavians in the north, while Aboriginal people largely lived on reserves. Yet, culturally, Ontario was predominantly British before the war, with 75 per cent of the population describing itself as being of British origin. Interestingly, 75 per cent of those people had, in fact, been born in Canada.

The Conservative premier of the day, James Pliny Whitney, although generally known for his forward-looking policies, was not as progressive in relation to language and religious tolerance. He proclaimed Ontario to be "an English province," thereby alienating French-speaking Ontarians. Responding to school conditions in the Ottawa Valley and northeastern Ontario, Whitney introduced Regulation 17 in 1912, limiting the teaching of French in schools. Mounting protests forced the government to moderate its policy and, in 1927, bilingual schools were officially recognized.

Whitney was elected in 1905, after a generation of Liberal governments. He solidified the Conservative position among urban voters by establishing funding for the University of Toronto, freeing it from direct government control. He also established the Workmen's Compensation Act in 1914 to provide for automatic compensation from the government to injured workers. After Whitney died in 1914, William Hearst

Rural values were an important factor in the 1914 provincial election.
Threshing machine with steam engine [ca. 1914] (Archives of Ontario, C 224-0-0-34).

served as premier for five years until being overturned by the United Farmers of Ontario.

During this pre-war period, the control of utilities was a central political and economic issue in Ontario. Whitney worked to bring the control of gas, water and electric-light facilities out of municipal hands and under provincial control, creating Ontario Hydro in 1908. His move was intended to provide Ontario with cheap, state-controlled power that, in turn, would give business and industry in Ontario the opportunity to grow.

Technological change encouraged capital investment in Canada, driving the Ontario economy to new heights and diversity. But with private hydroelectric development in the North after the signing of Treaty Nine in 1905-06, came infringements on aboriginal rights.

With Ontario's economy booming before the First World War, traditional agricultural, forestry and primary manufacturing industries grew, giving rise to new industries in mining and secondary manufacturing, such as iron and steel industries. By 1911, these new industries employed more workers than any other sector in Ontario cities. Growth attracted people as well as capital, and immigration to Canada increased, especially in Ontario. Manufacturing output also significantly expanded, bringing migrants from rural areas to cities to find work. By 1914, most of the people in Ontario lived in cities, working in manufacturing jobs instead of farming and primary industries.

In 1913, a major depression in Ontario interrupted this boom. But the war overseas quickly primed the economy. Between 1916 and 1918, Canada saw over $1 billion in war material contracts, 60 per cent of which came from Ontario alone. Industrial production was concentrated in Toronto and south-central Ontario, drawing migrants from surrounding areas to work in those industries. The economy grew to include more lawyers, middle managers and clerks. Government expanded its reach, becoming more interventionist, especially as we have seen with regard to hydroelectric power. South-central Ontario became Ontario's largest consumer market. Department stores appeared. And leisure activities grew. The number of nickelodeons, vaudeville theatres, saloons and dance halls in Toronto increased from five in 1900 to 112 by 1915.

Women faced discrimination in the workplace and society, being denied the most basic civil right of voting. The movement of young women from the country to cities presented, for many, a challenge to their accustomed rural life and social mores. At the time, domestic service was considered the proper employment for

The Ontario steel industry grew quickly during the pre-war years. Canadian Steel Foundries plant from across the Welland Canal [between 1913 and 1918] (Archives of Ontario, C 190-4-0-0-7).

Thread Milling Department, No. 101, British Percussion Fuze, Russell Motor Car Co. Ltd., Toronto. c. 1917
Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-024638.

young women. Elsewhere, female workers were the last hired and first fired, and paid less than their male counterparts.

Women fought back against discrimination and expressed their identity in Ontario in several ways. The Women's Institute, which grew to 900 branches by 1919, focused largely on providing women with social and community support within the context of improving home life. The suffrage movement grew to define and defend the rights of women. In the workplace, women fought against low wages, poor working conditions and long hours. In 1917, women were finally granted the right to vote, first exercising it in October 1919.

Following the rise of labour unions in late-19th-century Ontario, governments initiated efforts to establish a minimum standard of living – that is, to establish the budget needed to maintain the "health and decency" of a family of five. But the wages of most people fell short of this benchmark. Around the time of the war, the average adult male wages represented less than 75 per cent of the recommended amount.

With slow yet positive changes in the workforce, however, this new standard of living began to emerge. There was a gradual shift from lower-paying to higher-paying jobs. The number of working hours slowly declined, from 10 hours per day, six days per week, to nine hours per day with only a half day on Saturday. Companies also showed a rising awareness of the link between worker fatigue, workplace morale and productivity. The war also brought better safety measures and workplace conditions, such as improved ventilation, and – through wartime labour advocacy and reform – lunchrooms, midday meals at cost, pension plans and even company-sponsored sports teams.

Sadly, the state of public health in Ontario changed little from the 19th century through the first decade of the 20th. Slums expanded and infant mortality in 1909 rose to 180 per 1,000 live births – twice that of Rochester, New York, a comparably sized American city (and 37 times higher than in Ontario today). One of the major causes behind this shockingly high infant mortality rate was sewage. Toronto, for example, still dumped raw sewage into its harbour and pumped untreated water back into the city's water system. In response, the city began to filter and chlorinate the water and introduce other measures that, by 1910, meant that Toronto sewage was no longer poisoning its drinking water.

During that time, too, increased focus was placed on other public health measures and preventative medicine. Specific concern was paid to the relationship between sanitation, milk and infant mortality. For example, inspectors began to test milk

Condemned house, 149 Elizabeth Street, Toronto (rear view), September 28, 1917. City of Toronto Archives (Fonds 200, Series 372, Subseries 32, Item 505).

and dump whatever they found to be dirty. By 1913, Toronto required that milk had to be pasteurized. As a result, infant mortality fell significantly over the next five years. In 1912, Toronto also attempted to upgrade its housing stock, ordering slums to be condemned and attempting to eliminate outdoor privies, although indoor plumbing was costly and beyond the means of most workers.

Despite its challenges, Ontario did experience social reform. New religious reformers – the Social Gospel movement – argued that poverty, low wages, unemployment, overcrowded housing and poor public health in cities led to high mortality rates as well as disease. Social Gospel missions began offering services that later became the basis of the province's social welfare system. New relief organizations were also formed, such as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association, providing social recreation opportunities for youth, cheap meals for the poor, and classes teaching life and workplace skills. The Social Gospel movement also worked to eliminate public drunkenness, lower crime levels and generally improve social conditions among the poor. Members advocated moderation, then abstinence, then prohibition of alcohol. On the eve of the First World War, the issue of prohibition was a key part of the reform agenda and a central issue in provincial elections, resulting in the passing of the Temperance Act under Premier Hearst in 1916.

On the eve of war, Ontario was a province full of confidence and strength. For many, Ontario was a home that provided prosperity, stability and opportunity. But for others, it was not. Before the war, Ontario and its people faced and overcame many challenges that, in some ways, increasingly defined their understanding of themselves and their society. This was the social foundation for Ontario's experience in the coming war that set the stage for changes that were to follow.

Wayne Kelly is the Manager of Public Education and Community Development with the Trust.

An interview with Laura Brandon

Recently, the Ontario Heritage Trust spoke with Laura Brandon, the Acting Director of Research at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, to examine the role played by war art and artists in reporting events that occurred during the First World War.

Ontario Heritage Trust: What was Ontario like on the eve of the First World War?

Laura Brandon: The province was divided between urban and rural. Three-quarters of the population was also British in origin. Obviously, the ethnic mix in Ontario was far wider. But, in terms of governance, Ontarians were British subjects.

OHT: What was Ontario's place within the British Empire?

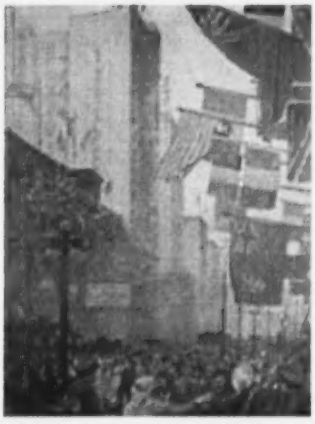
LB: Ontario was seen as part of Canada. But there was no doubt that the two most British provinces were British Columbia and Ontario.

In terms of the war itself, however, Ontario was very important. It was the industrial hub of the Canadian war effort, producing at least one-quarter of the ammunition used by British forces overseas. It was also a major fundraising hub for war efforts. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians enlisted. It's hard to be precise about numbers because many Canadians enlisted in Ontario. But the sign-up rate was huge.

OHT: What makes images so powerful? How was the war represented for the average Ontarian both on the home front and overseas?

LB: It is always hard to differentiate between public and private art. One of the things I recently discovered was the remarkably high number of people involved in the visual arts at the time. One hundred years later, we are reminded of what the world was like pre-photography through art.

Photography did exist, but not as widespread as it is now. Look at the enlistment papers and you'll see graphic artists, architects, sculptors, art students, poster painters, sign painters and designers. If the Canadian Expeditionary Forces (CEF) had visual skills, you can guarantee that the general public was also attuned to understanding world events and their context through visual means.



Artwork courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.

After the war erupted, art appeared in recruiting posters – strong images of soldiers and the need for soldiers – and also posters and flyers touting the need for funds for the war effort. These were the kinds of images that Canadians saw in their newspapers, journals and magazines.

Public or official art was intended to be permanent, while the posters and ephemera were not. Art commissioned for the war was intended for a memorial art gallery in Ottawa where future Canadians could learn about the First World War.

The private side of the visual arts used the talents of all of those artists who were actually in the war. Collectively referred to as "soldier art," this art includes the work of often well-known artists who also became solders (e.g., the Group of Seven's A.Y. Jackson). But soldier art also includes work by people no one had ever heard of.

As to what makes images so powerful – ultimately, it comes down to response. Human beings have always been visual. Widespread literacy is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating from Victorian times – so, about the last 200 years. Before that, people learned visually; we're wired to understand the world that way. Not surprisingly, images – whether on posters or postcards, in magazines or newspapers, whether photographed, painted or silkscreened – continue to make a huge impact.

OHT: What was the specific function or role of the war artist?

LB: Clearly, the intentions of the official and soldier artists were completely different. The official artists created massive canvasses designed for a memorial gallery that was ultimately never built – it was supposed to be where the National Gallery in Ottawa stands today. The intention there was purely historical. The initial idea was to have approximately 40 large-scale paintings that would show the work of the CEF throughout the First World War, from beginning to end. To see what it would have looked like, visit the Senate Chamber on Ottawa's Parliament Hill where eight of these massive paintings have hung since 1921.

Private art, on the other hand, had a completely different function. It was the kind of art that could be, and was, sent home. It was more about the war experience at a personal level. Most of this art has, until recently, disappeared into archives because it's not large and impressive and doesn't involve famous artists.

Yet much of it is incredibly emotive – for example, capturing a soldier responding to some moment of beauty that he found in the midst of war. That, to me, is the important part of this private art – it gives you another perspective on the war, which allows for these private moments of joy, pleasure or sorrow.

OHT: How does art uniquely convey or capture the war experience?

LB: I've concentrated on what I believe the art does. But, I've left out the viewer – an important part of the equation. While both public and private war art share a purpose that the artist determined they should have, the audience doesn't necessarily pay attention to that. Artworks create their own meaning, unique to each person looking at them.

The Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.
(Photo: Harry Foster, Canadian Museum of History)

OHT: Was the First World War the first conflict to generate such a broad and busy visual culture?

LB: There have always been war artists. The difference with the First World War was its size and scope. We can talk about Canadian or Ontario war art, but every nation involved in the First World War had some kind of visual art program or visual artists engaged in creating works of art. I believe that the extensive presence of art is unique to the First World War because it was such a massive, industrialized, global conflict involving millions of people.

OHT: Have perceptions and representations of the First World War changed over the past century?

LB: People still paint scenes from the First World War. As time goes by, however, different forms of knowledge come into play, different social contexts and cultures. And that affects the lens through which we look at the past and the resultant art.

For example, one of the things that surprises people about Canadian First World War art is how few paintings have poppies in them, given that the poppy is now so closely associated with that war. Many people also only know the war through photography, which is largely black and white. So, when they think of the First World War, it's in black, white and grey. On the other hand, the Canadian War Museum has sketches in the Lord Beaverbrook collection of war art that are brightly coloured with vivid blue skies and fluffy white clouds. They provide evidence of a much more complicated war imagery.

Look at all of the art from this period to understand what life was really like then. Not surprisingly, different aspects over time have come more into focus than others. For example, 100 years ago, there was probably little interest in identifying artworks that had women in them because the First World War was primarily seen as a male endeavour. Today, however, more effort would be made to ensure that any artworks or photographs from that era redress that marginalization.

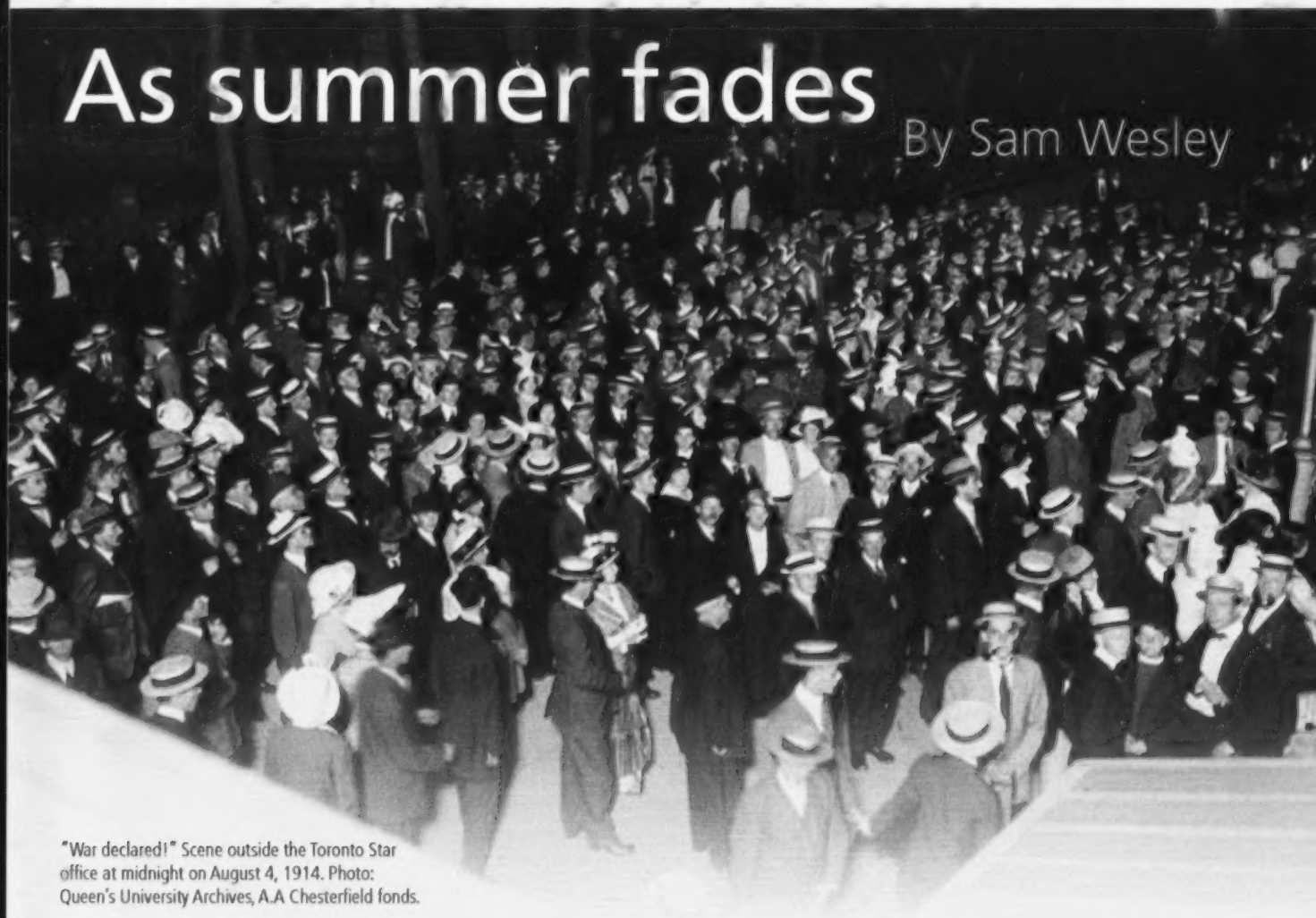
Furthermore, one of the things we talk about when we talk about war art is the concept of remembering and forgetting. It's this coming into and going out of focus of different aspects of something that was documented a century ago that colours our understanding of this conflict at different times. What matters in one decade doesn't necessarily matter in another. But, at the end of the day, what was created 100 years ago in the form of art matters today because it directly relates to that time, tells you about it and helps you understand different perspectives of the same war.

That's what this art helps us to do. It helps us to look at a moment in time 100 years ago, to understand it better, and to give us the opportunity to reflect on it 100 years later.

To read the full interview and to see other examples of this fascinating war art, visit www.heritagetrust.on.ca/hm. For more information about the Canadian War Museum, visit www.warmuseum.ca.

As summer fades

By Sam Wesley



"War declared!" Scene outside the Toronto Star office at midnight on August 4, 1914. Photo: Queen's University Archives, A.A Chesterfield fonds.

Europe was bursting with energy as the spring of 1914 gave way to one the warmest and most beautiful summers in recent memory. Much of that energy, however, was fuelled by tension.

Long-held traditions and ways of life vied with the modern era. The world had become rapidly and increasingly globalized in preceding decades; existing structures of governance were ill equipped to keep up. New social and political structures were being formulated, and national identities were being redefined. Some envisioned a different future, while others held strong to traditional models that had offered stability and guided Europe through nearly a century of relative peace. As they scrambled to adapt, to suppress and mitigate these forces, tensions between and within the empires and European nations were mounting.

Austria-Hungary, in particular, was struggling to keep its empire together. A complicated series of standoffs and diplomatic machinations were set in motion on June 28 when the heir to the throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo by a young Bosnian Serb nationalist. These events, in turn, invoked a recently created entanglement of alliances that saw the so-called Triple Entente (France, Russia and Great Britain) poised against the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary).

The assassination gave Austria-Hungary the pretext it needed to suppress a threatening South Slav revolt within their empire; they sought the support of Germany in retaliating against the Serbians, who they suspected were behind the Archduke's death. Germany was willing to lend the desired support, partially out of fear that if the Austro-Hungarian Empire were to collapse, Germany would be encircled by Triple Entente powers.

In Ontario, newspapers and their readers followed developments on the European continent with interest. But it was the threat of civil war in Ireland that dominated public discourse and seemed the more pressing matter in June and

July of 1914. This issue, however, would soon be overshadowed by events on the continent.

By the end of July, developments in Europe had taken a dangerous turn. After Serbia failed to satisfy an impossible ultimatum, Austria declared war on July 26. Germany and Russia had been drawn into the conflict and soon – due to botched diplomatic efforts, poor communication, suspicion, fear, pride and jealousy – France and Great Britain would be involved as well. Within a few days, the major powers of Europe were mobilizing for war.

Throughout Europe, crowds gathered in streets and squares, singing patriotic songs, listening to speeches and sharing news. Radical nationalists in most of the concerned nations amplified rhetoric and resentment, putting further pressure on political leaders to appear resolute and combative. Many, pursuing half-baked theories of Social Darwinism, believed that war would extinguish weaker nations and elements within Europe and thereby be regenerative. Public opinion was becoming an increasingly important factor in a democratizing Europe. In this instance, it actually helped tip the scales toward war.

Mobilizations in the first days of August were difficult to reverse and severely limited the amount of time decision-makers had to find alternatives as the crisis escalated. Still, as historians have recently emphasized, war was not inevitable; there were opportunities for all concerned nations to defuse the situation.

On August 2, after having demanded that Russia stop mobilization, Germany declared war on Russia and then on France – Russia's ally – the next day. Germany then invaded Belgium, forcing Great Britain to declare war at midnight on August 4. Great Britain's declaration of war meant that her colonies – including Canada – were also at war.

At first, there was a sense of excitement throughout Ontario and Canada as the opportunity to serve the motherland and participate in this global conflict presented itself. Crowds gathered in villages, towns and cities across Ontario, singing God Save the Queen and Rule Britannia. Patriotic oaths were sworn, and enemies were denounced and vilified as uncivilized, degenerate threats to liberty, stability and, ironically, peace. Others simply felt duty-bound to defend the country and empire in which they lived.

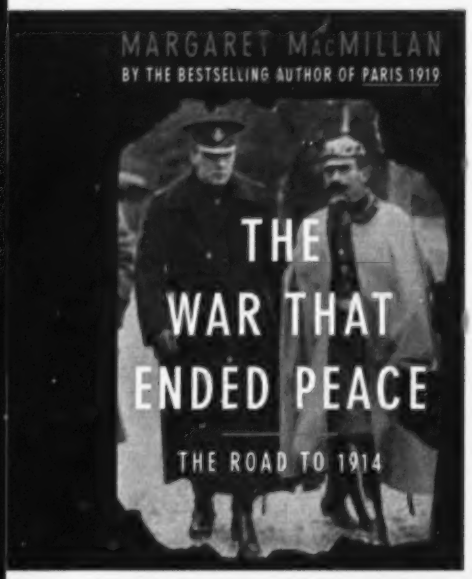
Similar crowds gathered in Paris, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin and Munich, where a young Adolf Hitler sank to his knees and thanked heaven that he was "permitted to live in such times." The naïveté, jingoism and nativism displayed in these days can be difficult to understand with the hindsight that, in the coming years, millions of lives would be lost and countless others devastated as slaughter was enacted on the largest scale the world had ever seen.

In the days following the declaration of war, militia headquarters across Ontario were overwhelmed by the thousands of young men clamouring to enlist. Many, in fact, had to be turned away. Those able to enlist, however, trained at local armouries before being sent to Valcartier, Quebec, where the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force gathered and trained before embarking for England on October 1. After training for months in the Salisbury mud during one of the wettest winters in decades, Canadian troops eagerly headed for France. Uncertain of what lay ahead.

Sam Wesley is the Trust's Site Coordinator for the Parliament interpretive centre in Toronto.

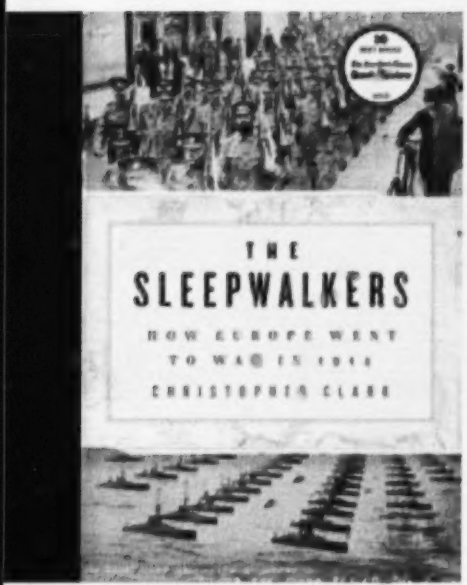
Army recruiting office, August 5, 1914, Toronto. Source: Toronto Star.

Resources



The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914, by Margaret MacMillan, Allen Lane Canada (an imprint of Penguin Canada Books Inc.), 2013.

In November 1915, Winston Churchill, then-First Lord of the Admiralty for Britain, remarked, "At the beginning of this War, megalomania was the only form of sanity." Churchill's comment refers in large part to the chaotic backdrop of events that occurred before Europe's tragic march toward the Great War. In her most recent book, historian Margaret MacMillan asserts that this war was anything but inevitable. She provides a carefully executed narrative that describes the intricate interplay of European emperors, diplomats and military officials as they tried to out-manoeuvre one another for prestige and power during the years and months that led to war. MacMillan opens the book with a description of Europe in 1900 and moves the reader forward as she focuses on the importance of the individuals who made the decisions – both large and small – that, together, tipped Europe over the precipice of war.



The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914, by Christopher Clark, Harper Collins Canada, 2013.

On the morning of June 28, 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie Chotek arrived at Sarajevo railway station, Europe was at peace. Thirty-seven days later, it was at war. The conflict that resulted would kill more than 15 million people, destroy three empires and permanently alter world history.

The Sleepwalkers reveals in gripping detail how the crisis leading to the First World War unfolded. Drawing on fresh sources, it traces the paths to war in a minute-by-minute, action-packed narrative that cuts among the key decision centres in Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Paris, London and Belgrade. Distinguished historian Christopher Clark examines the decades of history that informed the events of 1914 and details the mutual misunderstandings and unintended signals that drove the crisis forward in a few short weeks.

How did the Balkans – a peripheral region far from Europe's centres of power and wealth – come to be the centre of a drama of such magnitude? How had European nations organized themselves into opposing alliances, and how did these nations manage to carry out foreign policy as a result? Clark reveals a Europe racked by chronic problems – a fractured world of instability and militancy that was, fatefully, saddled with a conspicuously ineffectual set of political leaders. These rulers, who prided themselves on their modernity and rationalism, stumbled through crisis after crisis and finally convinced themselves that war was the only answer.

Meticulously researched and masterfully written, The Sleepwalkers is a magisterial account of one of the most compelling dramas of modern times.

At the gallery ...

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (www.ago.net)
"The Great Upheaval: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collection, 1910-1918" until March 2, 2014. The artistic frenzy that swept Europe in the years leading up to and during the First World War comes alive in the paintings by artists such as Constantin Brancusi, Marc Chagall, Marcel Duchamp, Vasily Kandinsky, Fernand Leger, Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani, Piet Mondrian and Pablo Picasso.

Web resources ...

Canadian War Museum, Ottawa
(www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/home-e.aspx)
In addition to the First World War gallery at our national museum, there is a virtual exhibit entitled "Canada and the First World War" on the museum's website. Sections are devoted to an introduction to the First World War, the history of the war, photos and artifacts from the First World War, and a selection of teacher resources. Additional and related exhibits to legacy and remembrance can also be found here. The museum also has approximately 300 pieces of war art on display in its galleries at any given time, some of which can be viewed in another virtual exhibit, "Official War Art of the First World War" (see www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/official-art-e.aspx) – which includes paintings, drawings, sketches and portraits of the war by Canadian war artists.

Did you know? The museum features windows on the north peak that were placed in Morse code pattern to spell out "Lest We Forget" in both official languages?

Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Ottawa
(www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/cef/index-e.html)
The Library and Archives Canada digital collections include a database of soldiers who fought in the First World War – an index to the service files of over 600,000 men and women who enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the First World War.

In addition, the LAC has assembled the following databases, registers and records (see www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/military-peace/index-e.html):

- Circumstances of Death Registers, First World War – detailed descriptions of cause of death, where available, date and location of death, and burial information
- Commonwealth War Graves, First World War – date and location of casualty, next-of-kin details and place of burial with plot or grave numbers, where available
- Courts martial of the First World War – courts martial were legal bodies that convened to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused; punishments for military offences ranged from fines and imprisonment to execution
- Medals, Honours and Awards – medal registers, citation cards and records of various military awards; these records indicate the medal, honour or award to which an individual was entitled; records are available for service from the 19th century and beyond
- War Diaries of the First World War – not personal diaries, but historical records of a military unit's administration, operations and activities during the First World War

The Memory Project. Veterans Affairs Canada and Historica Canada
(www.thememoryproject.com/stories/WWI) – Stories of Service and Sacrifice
Stories from First World War veterans, with photographs, ephemera and recordings of personal interviews given by family members, descendants or friends of the veterans. Transcripts are also provided of the audio content.

Veterans Affairs Canada
(www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/virtualmem/detail/75100)
Members of the public may submit photographs of Canadian veterans through this website. The images and names are then incorporated into a virtual war memorial (the Canadian Virtual War Memorial).

BRINGING OUR STORY TO LIFE

Ontario Heritage Trust

Photo: Fulford Place, Brockville

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST
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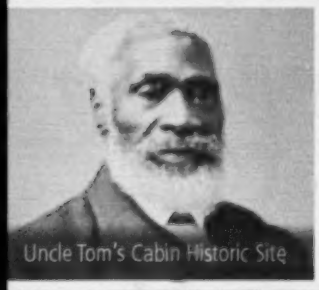
For more information, visit
www.heritagetrust.on.ca/museums
or snap this tag:


Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

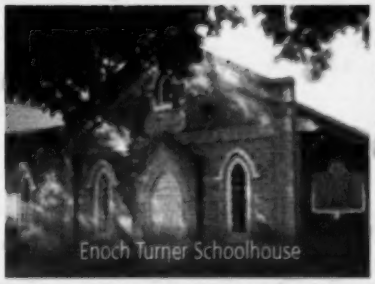

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

Photo: David Le
Parliament interpretive centre

Fulford Place

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